

MINUTES
NEWINGTON TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
SPECIAL MEETING

April 6, 2009

Mayor Wright called the meeting to order at 8:32 PM in the Council Chambers of the Newington Town Hall.

I PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

II ROLL CALL

Councilors Present

Councilor Banach
Councilor Boni
Councilor Bottalico
Councilor Bowen
Councilor Cohen
Councilor Lenares
Councilor Nagel
Councilor Nasinnyk
Mayor Wright

Staff Present

Town Manager John Salomone
Lori Verreault, Executive Assistant
Ann Harter, Finance Director

III PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Steve Woods, 94 New Britain Avenue, Board of Education Member: Mr. Woods stated that the Town spends about \$6.3 million per year on capital improvements, a combination of about \$2.5 million in debt services and \$3.8 million in pay as you go projects. Mr. Woods noted that Councilor Bowen set up the CIP Committee during a past Council because he realized that the Town was not doing a good job of planning capital improvements, which caused huge swings in capital improvement funding in each budget cycle. He explained that the CIP took the money that came out of the ongoing debt and kept it in the CIP fund so that there is now a stable fund to either take on debt or pay for projects as they go. He stated that Councilor Bowen saw what it would take to make this happen and remarked that the Council is now starting to reap the rewards of Councilor Bowen's foresight. Mr. Woods remarked that the \$300,000 for the parking lot project is in addition to a \$1 million grant and stated that the CIP Committee had unanimously decided to not allocate any additional funds past the \$1 million grant for the project.

Gary Bolles, 28 Burdon Lane: Mr. Bolles noted that the public has spoken and has asked the Council not to spend the \$300,000 on the downtown parking lot improvements. He asked the Council to please adhere to the public's wishes.

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive: Ms. Lyons stated that while she is not against revitalizing the downtown area she stated that it is not acceptable to add the funding to the parking lot and it is not acceptable for the Council to have come to this conclusion using the process that it did to allocate the funds. She remarked that perhaps people would be more agreeable to the funding if ideas or plans for the project had been shared. She inquired as to what the \$300,000 project funding would cover that couldn't be paid for by the \$1 million.

IV CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

A Adjustments to the Town Council's Tentative Budget, if needed

Councilor Bowen indicated that he has four items created as a Democratic initiative for the Council to consider. He stated that he is interested in revitalizing the downtown area for the businesses in the area that do an outstanding job in providing services to residents. He noted that he was part of the Council that received State and other funding to spruce up the building fronts and sidewalks of the downtown area. He noted that the Town has received a \$1 million grant from the State for the parking lot project and in speaking to the Town Planner and the Chair of the Development Commission he is very confident that the \$1 million can take care of repaving and repairing drainage issues in the downtown municipal parking lot.

Councilor Bowen moved to eliminate \$300,000 from the municipal parking lot project from the budget (account #111008501). Motion seconded by Councilor Banach.

Councilor Cohen stated that the parking lot has not been discussed by the Council other than when it learned about receiving a \$1 million grant after the fact. She stated that a Downtown Revitalization Committee was formed with members from both the Council and the Development Commission and although the Council was told that this is not a building committee the Committee has proceeded in a similar fashion as a project building committee. She stated that funding estimates and requests have been all over the place, from \$1 million to \$1.8 million, yet the Council still has not seen any final plans or cost analysis for the project. She stated that the request for \$300,000 in funding for the project is premature and stated that there are better things that the Town can do with the \$300,000.

Councilor Nasinnyk stated agreement with Councilors Cohen and Bowen and stated that the CIP Committee is the group that prioritizes all of the Town's capital improvement needs. She stated that the CIP Committee has not met prior to the request for the \$300,000 for the project. She noted that the Mayor had stated that the decision was made at a Republican caucus to include the \$300,000, and she indicated that she is also not aware of the plans for the project. She stated that the \$1 million is a good start for the project and remarked that the \$300,000 can be put to better use.

Councilor Bowen stated that it is important to remember that the \$300,000 is in addition to a \$1 million grant and noted that there are other projects that must be addressed, such as the dire need for Town Hall renovations and the school code compliance project. He stated that the money can be spent elsewhere and stated that in these times it would be much better spent on something the Town needs rather than on something that the Town already has \$1 million to do.

Councilor Bottalico stated that the item has been discussed to death and stated that he will support the motion. Deputy Mayor Lenares stated that the Council has heard comments this evening from eighteen residents regarding the parking lot. He stated that he is the Chair of the CIP Committee and apologized for not calling a meeting of the CIP earlier. He stated that he does not just vote according to party lines and stated that it is a tough decision to make, given these tough economic times and the fact that the parking lot is in rough shape. He stated that he agrees with removing the \$300,000 allocation to the parking lot project but noted that the Town may have to put additional funding into the lot at some point in future years to complete the project if the \$1 million is not enough to do all of the necessary work. He questioned as to why the Town has not been maintaining the lot. Deputy Mayor Lenares stated that he will have a request for reallocating the \$300,000, to be discussed later.

Councilor Boni stated that he is not in favor of the motion and stated that it is a great investment in the Town. He commented that he has been a resident long enough to know what the Town needs and indicated that \$300,000 out of a \$94 million dollar budget is not a lot of money. He stated that he envisions the area to be a place to walk around and enjoy and a place to attract revenue and increase the Town's grand list.

Councilor Nagel stated that he is not in favor of the motion. He stated that he feels that the project will be beneficial to the Town and will bring more revenue to the Town while making the center a focal point and making the area more accessible to everyone. He remarked that there is money in the budget for the schools, the Town Hall and various other infrastructure projects and stated that adding the \$300,000 is a wise investment that shows concern for the merchants in the center of the Town.

Mayor Wright stated that he has advocated for this project for a long time and stated that he is encouraged that a \$300,000 item is the biggest gripe among the \$94,000,000 budget. He stated that this budget fully funds the Board's three-percent request while avoiding layoffs and keeping the mill rate increase to 2.6%. He stated that the downtown revitalization project is a huge step forward for the Town and stated that the project is moving forward thanks to the \$1 million State grant. He stated that it is not uncommon for projects to move forward without final plans, noting the example of the ongoing Town Hall renovations. He noted that the Town Planner has estimated that the downtown project will cost \$1.8 million and stated that every dollar of the project will go towards municipal improvements. He noted a speaker's question about the photo of a car in the flooded lot shown during his budget presentation and he stated that he took the picture only a couple of days prior to the meeting. He stated that the downtown area has been neglected and indicated that the area has been studied over and over since 1976. He stated that this project will bring new business, more restaurants and shopping and perhaps even new buildings and explained that the idea behind the project is to help increase the tax base and to encourage growth in the Town.

Mayor Wright requested a roll call vote:

Councilor Banach: Yes
Councilor Boni: No
Councilor Bottalico: Yes
Councilor Bowen: Yes
Councilor Cohen: Yes
Councilor Lenares: Yes
Councilor Nagel: No
Councilor Nasinnyk: Yes
Mayor Wright: No

Motion passed 6-3 as indicated.

Councilor Bowen moved to decrease the current road fund by \$400,000 (account #8501). Motion seconded by Councilor Banach.

Councilor Bowen stated that the cornerstone of this proposed reduction is not that he doesn't believe that the Town needs to spend money on roads and he noted that spending on roads had doubled four years ago because the CIP and Highway Department realized that the Town needs to spend more money on roads. He noted that the Town's big investment into its roads has been paying off. He stated that the Town receives a 55% reimbursement from the State for any money spent on school code compliance issues and noted concerns and speculations that the State reimbursement rate may decrease in the coming years to as low as 40%. He stated that he had spoken to members of the CIP Committee and had previously been willing to reduce the code compliance fund drastically just to make a down payment to show the State where the Town is heading and to get the project moving. He stated, however, that after realizing concerns that the reimbursement may decrease he is concerned that the Town may lose a percentage of the State funding. Councilor Bowen stated that the Town has \$400,000 in State aid going towards the roads and indicated that even with this proposed cut the Town will still have nearly \$800,000 to spend on the roads this year. He stated that early estimates indicate that the school code compliance project will cost about \$2 million dollars, and with the 55% State funding the Town will need to have approximately \$900,000 to \$1 million in the fund in order to lock in the full 55% reimbursement. He noted that while he is not saying that code compliance is any more or less important than the roads he does feel that it is important that the Town does not risk losing the extra funding from the State. He indicated that the Mayor's budget presentation showed that the Town Manager's proposed budget for the roads is \$700,000, yet further down in the presentation showed zero in the Town Manager's proposed budget for the municipal parking lot and a \$300,000 tentative budget for the lot. He stated that this is misleading because the \$700,000 for the roads includes a \$400,000 State grant, yet the \$1 million grant was not included in the line item for the parking lot. Councilor Nasinnyk concurred with Councilor Bowen and remarked that the Highway Department did not seek the additional funding.

Councilor Bottalico noted that this winter was very tough on the roads and stated that the Town should spend the extra money on road repairs this year. Councilor Nagel stated that in these economic times the pricing for the school code compliance project may be less than originally estimated and stated that the project will be stretched over a long period of time. He noted that organizations reviewed by the

School Code Compliance Committee had stressed that there are items that can be addressed to meet the code qualifications without costing any more than necessary. He agreed with Councilor Bottalico about the Town's need for road repair after this winter. Councilor Boni stated that the school code compliance project will continue over a number of years and remarked that the roads do need a lot of work due to the harsh winter.

Councilor Cohen noted that the Town has been receiving \$400,000 in State funding for road repairs for a number of years and stated that the amount is not contingent upon the level of Town funds spent on road repairs. She stated, however, that the State will reimburse a certain percentage of the money budgeted for the school code compliance project and the more the Town spends the more it gets from the State. She cautioned, however, that the funding must be included in the budget in order to be eligible for reimbursement and explained that the more the Town puts into the budget the more it locks in from the State. She stated that this is a wise way for the Town to handle its funding in these economic times.

Deputy Mayor Lenares spoke in opposition of the motion and stated that the Town needs to make up for previous years of not providing enough funding to keep up with road repairs. He stated that while he appreciates the reimbursement for the school code compliance project he has heard that the rumors about the State reimbursement decreasing for the past four years and indicated that the reimbursement has actually increased from the time he served on the Board of Education.

Councilor Banach stated that the Council knows for certain that there is a \$0.55 reimbursement for every dollar it spends on the school code compliance project. He noted that we are in a totally different economic situation this year than in past years and stated that the Town should be taking advantage of the reimbursement while it still exists. He stated that there is a significant amount of funding allocated for road repair. Councilor Bowen stated that the school code compliance project must eventually be paid for one way or the other and he promised that he will vote to allocate any funding not needed for the school code compliance project back into the roads.

Mayor Wright stated that all funding sources from the State government are at risk at this point. He indicate that the Board's CIP project list contains about \$45 million worth of projects and stated that not every project can be done every year, even if it is at a discount. He stated that the compliance issues must be addressed on a meaningful and an annual basis until it is complete and noted that the recent field house renovation was a meaningful step in the project. He stated that all construction projects in this economy will be at a discount and noted that repaving and asphalt cost less this year due to decreased oil prices and stated that now is the time to invest in the roads. He stated that he is not in favor of decreasing the road fund and is in fact in favor of increasing the road fund.

Mayor Wright requested a roll call vote:

Councilor Banach: Yes

Councilor Boni: No

Councilor Bottalico: No

Councilor Bowen: Yes

Councilor Cohen: Yes

Councilor Lenares: No

Councilor Nagel: No

Councilor Nasinnyk: Yes

Mayor Wright: No

Motion failed 4-5 as indicated.

Councilor Bowen moved to increase Town Hall Renovations by \$100,000 (account #8502). Motion seconded by Councilor Banach.

Councilor Bowen explained that NCTV needs to be moved into the Town Hall prior to the New Meadow construction project, and stated that the \$100,000 gives a little leeway in case the actual construction costs to the Town Hall project come up a little higher. He stated that he would be willing to reallocate the funding later in the year if it is not needed but stated that it is important to have enough funding to get the Town Hall renovations done so that NCTV can move in on time. Councilor Cohen stated that the speed

issue is very important because NCTV needs a place to go. Councilor Nasinnyk agreed and stated that it is crucial that NCTV is moved on site promptly so that work may begin on the New Meadow project.

Councilor Bottalico noted that Mr. Korpak, Director of Facilities Management, feels confident that the originally allocated \$1.3 million will be sufficient for this phase of the Town Hall project and Councilor Bottalico stated that he is not in support of the motion. Councilor Nagel agreed with Councilor Bottalico. Councilor Banach stated that the Town Hall project has been ongoing for a long time and has not received the attention it deserves. He stated that while the Town has begun to move forward on the project it could use some accelerant as well.

Mayor Wright stated that Mr. Korpak feels confident that the project can be completed with the funding allocated and noted that the boiler phase of the project actually came in under budget. He stated that he does not support the motion.

Mayor Wright requested a roll call vote:

Councilor Banach: Yes

Councilor Boni: No

Councilor Bottalico: No

Councilor Bowen: Yes

Councilor Cohen: Yes

Councilor Lenares: No

Councilor Nagel: No

Councilor Nasinnyk: Yes

Mayor Wright: No

Motion failed 4-5 as indicated.

Councilor Bowen moved to increase the NHS Code Compliance fund by \$300,000 (account #8502). Motion seconded by Councilor Nasinnyk.

Councilor Cohen indicated that the Town will receive a sizable reimbursement from the State on the project and stated that the more it allocates to the budget the more it will receive from the State and stated that any unused funding will carry over into next year if needed. Councilor Bowen indicated that with the 55% matching he would recommend that the Town allocates the money it needs for the project now. Councilor Banach inquired why the Town would not take advantage of a 55% rate of return. Councilor Nasinnyk stated that it just makes sense to do so. Mayor Wright stated that he feels that the roads are in a desperate situation this year and stated that he is not in favor of the motion.

Mayor Wright requested a roll call vote:

Councilor Banach: Yes

Councilor Boni: No

Councilor Bottalico: No

Councilor Bowen: Yes

Councilor Cohen: Yes

Councilor Lenares: No

Councilor Nagel: No

Councilor Nasinnyk: Yes

Mayor Wright: No

Motion failed 4-5 as indicated.

Deputy Mayor Lenares moved to allocate an additional \$100,000 to the Parks and Recreation Department for park and playground maintenance. Motion seconded by Councilor Boni.

Councilor Bowen inquired why the Deputy Mayor chose the \$100,000 figure. Deputy Mayor Lenares explained that \$100,000 brings the Parks and Recreation Department back to the level of funding that they should have been at last year. He stated that the Town has many neglected parks and playgrounds that need attention. Councilor Bowen stated that the Town Manager's request was originally for \$74,000 and stated that the \$225,000 total is three times the originally requested amount. He also inquired

whether Parks and Recreation pays for the safety chips placed under school playground equipment. Deputy Mayor Lenares replied that the Parks and Recreation Department does pay for the mulch and safety chips at the schools.

Councilor Banach inquired whether any of the funding would go towards improvement of neighborhood parks and whether such funding would be distributed evenly among the parks. Deputy Mayor Lenares replied that the original request from the department heads was \$136,000, which the Town Manager brought down to \$74,000. He stated that adding the \$100,000 will basically bring the funding back to where it should have been last year to this year. Councilor Banach inquired whether there will be significant differences in the parks in one year as compared to how they look today. Deputy Mayor Lenares replied in the affirmative. Councilor Bowen inquired why it is necessary to fund the account at a higher level than originally requested by the department head and the Town Manager. Mayor Wright stated that the neighborhood parks have been woefully under-maintained and stated that this will allow the Town to get a head start at replacing playground equipment. He stated that this is a good investment in the neighborhoods. Deputy Mayor Lenares stated that the new Superintendent may not be aware that the Parks and Recreation budget had a zero-percent increase in its CIP budget last year.

Councilor Banach inquired whether any of the proposed funding is tied to the recommendations that came from the recent park study and evaluation and inquired whether a significant amount of the funding will go towards improving neighborhood parks. Deputy Mayor Lenares replied in the affirmative.

Councilor Bottalico stated that the Human Services department often refers people to the Parks and Recreation Department to participate in programs such as daycare or sports program with waived fees and noted that the Parks and Recreation Department has to pick up the cost of the waived fees. He stated that the incidences of waived fees are way up this year to the point where it is causing the Parks and Recreation Department problems in trying to figure out its budget. He stated that the Parks Department does not receive reimbursement from the Human Services department for the waived fees. He stated that he is in favor of the motion. Councilor Bowen noted that the Council is a policy making body and does go into individual budgets to tell department heads how to run their departments. He stated that he will be in favor of the motion if the money will be allocated towards the parks. Deputy Mayor replied that he believes that the funding will be allocated towards park and playground improvement. Mayor Wright stated support for the motion.

Mayor Wright requested a roll call vote:

Councilor Banach: Yes
Councilor Boni: Yes
Councilor Bottalico: Yes
Councilor Bowen: Yes
Councilor Cohen: Yes
Councilor Lenares: Yes
Councilor Nagel: Yes
Councilor Nasinnyk: Yes
Mayor Wright: Yes

Motion passed 9-0 as indicated.

Deputy Mayor Lenares moved to reallocate \$200,000 to the CIP for road repairs. Motion seconded by Councilor Bottalico.

Deputy Mayor Lenares stated that while there is a lot of money in the road budget, this rough winter has caused a lot of problems and the reallocation will allow the Town to make good progress towards road repairs. Councilor Banach stated that he will vote no on the motion in order to be consistent with his previous vote on the school code compliance funding.

Councilor Nasinnyk inquired whether there has been any consideration of simply decreasing the Town's budget by the \$200,000 rather than allocating the funds into the already large road budget. Mayor Wright replied that one of the long term goals of the Council is to keep the CIP funded at the \$6.3 million level. He stated that it is important for the integrity of the budget to keep the CIP intact.

Councilor Bowen stated that while items that he felt are much more worthy of the funding have been ignored he will vote in favor of the motion in order to keep the CIP intact. He stated that it is not a waste of money to put money in the roads, but remarked that this will create an inordinate amount of money in the road fund and stated that it would have been more fiscally responsible to try to take care of as many issues as possible. Councilor Cohen recommended splitting the funds: \$100,000 towards the roads and \$100,000 towards the school code compliance. Councilors Banach and Nasinnyk agreed with Councilor Cohen. Mayor Wright stated that it is time to invest in the roads.

Mayor Wright requested a roll call vote:

Councilor Banach: No

Councilor Boni: Yes

Councilor Bottalico: Yes

Councilor Bowen: Yes

Councilor Cohen: No

Councilor Lenares: Yes

Councilor Nagel: Yes

Councilor Nasinnyk: No

Mayor Wright: Yes

Motion passed 6-3 as indicated.

V PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Barbara Katzman, 5 Eckert Road: Mrs. Katzman stated that she has been dissatisfied with the way the cracks in her road have been repaired and stated that the black tar material used to fill the cracks often peels up from the road and ends up in her lawn and flower beds. She urged the Town to perform proper paving, not just patchwork repairs.

Steve Woods, 94 New Britain Avenue, Board of Education member: Mr. Woods stated that he is extremely disappointed that the majority of the Council voted against adding funds back into the school code compliance project and the fact that the Council favors roads over making schools accessible to children and staff with physical handicaps. He remarked that it is deplorable not to recognize this. He stated that the Town should want to do this project and urged the public to come out to speak its opinion about this item.

Clark Castelle, 167 Connecticut Avenue: Mr. Castelle noted that as a special education tutor at the high school he has witnessed the enormous difficulties that students who have difficulty walking face when moving about the building. He stated that it is foolish to risk forgoing the 55% State reimbursement for the project when it may not be available in future years.

Maureen Klett, 104 Harold Drive: Mrs. Klett stated that while it is understandable that more people are going to be using the Town's parks this year she would have liked to hear ideas about using the reallocated finds to help people in the Town rather than to provide landscaping for parks, cement and woodchips. She stated that people are hurting in this economy and stated that the Town could do without throwing an extra \$100,000 towards improving playgrounds. She thanked the Council for its hard work and efforts.

Don Woods, 82 Ivy Lane: Mr. Woods stated that the parks should be in top shape and noted that the woodchips used at the playgrounds are actually very important for safety purposes. He stated that many parks are in great need of repairs and must also meet safety requirements. He stated that the aforementioned chips are actually safety chips that are required and are a necessary part of keeping the parks up to code. He stated that there were numerous projects that should have been completed last year that can now be completed this year. He thanked the Council on behalf of Parks and Recreation and assured the Council that the money will be put to good use.

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive: Ms. Lyons urged the Council to utilize the phone line that the Board of Education uses for public participation at its meetings. She stated that some of the Town's parks have been neglected for years. She noted that a group of volunteers has cleaned up the path near the old

New Meadow School and remarked that it shouldn't be up to the tax payers to clean up the parks. She recommended that some of the funding be allocated to that area.

VI REMARKS BY COUNCILORS

Councilor Nasinnyk remarked that a good portion of the discussion was spent on CIP items and stated that some of the debate could have been avoided if the CIP had met to hammer out these items and create Committee recommendations in advance of this meeting. She thanked the residents who participated in the meeting and stated that there is still time for the public to express its concerns and comments prior to the Council's vote on the budget on April 14.

Councilor Banach noted that this is the first year in his time as a Councilor that the Council has not held a goal-setting meeting prior to the start of the budget session. He stressed the importance of such meeting, stating that it gives the Council a prime opportunity to set goals and priorities for the Town while not waiting until the budget session to begin to debate the issues.

Councilor Bottalico stated that the Parks and Recreation Department is also required to follow OSHA requirements and stated that it is good to give the department extra money to make up for last year. He stated that while the Council cannot please everyone he serves on the Council for the good of the Town and the taxpayers.

Councilor Nagel stated that he is pleased with the Council's conversations and compromises as well as the outcome of the current meeting.

Councilor Boni stated that he is pleased with the Council's compromises and stated that the result is a very good budget.

Councilor Cohen thanked the staff members who did the initial legwork for the budget and noted that the budget is not final until the April 14 Council vote. She reminded the public that there is still a chance to come and speak about the budget.

Councilor Bowen thanked everyone who came out to the meeting and apologized for not better explaining the scope of the school code compliance project. He stated that the project addresses the needs of a portion of the community that really needs the Town's support on this project. He noted that the public has one more chance to speak before the Council votes on the budget.

Mayor Wright stated that this is a great budget. He stated that he is glad that the Council was able to fund the Board at three-percent while avoiding layoffs and keeping the tax increase at 2.6%. He stated that he is pleased that more money will be going back into repairing Town roads and the neighborhood parks. He noted that most of the conversations have been over \$300,000 for downtown revitalization - a figure that amounts to only one-third of one-percent of the \$94,000,000 budget. He thanked everyone in attendance and thanked the Town Manager and staff members for their hard work.

VII ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Banach moved to adjourn at 10:10pm. Motion seconded by Councilor Boni.
Motion passed 9-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jaime Trevethan
Clerk of the Council

